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ABSTRACT

The major concern of the educational system in Israel today is how to advance students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and from a cultural background which is different from that of the privileged sectors of the population. In general, the problem of educationally disadvantaged students is related to the problem of social gaps. These gaps are found primarily between those coming from the Afro-Asian countries and those whose origin is in Western Europe or the Americas. Changes in the treatment of the educationally disadvantaged are represented by two main programs: The Reform of Secondary Education Accompanied by Integration, and a comprehensive program for the disadvantaged called The Educational Welfare Program. Other programs include boarding programs, tutoring programs, and programs for dropouts. Much remains to be done, however, as is shown by numerous studies which point to unsatisfactory academic achievement and a continuing education gap. (Author/RLV)

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Ministry of Education and Culture

The Israeli Educational System

and

The Problem of the Disadvantaged

by

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THE ISRAELI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND THE PROBLEM OF THE DISADVANTAGED

The major concern of the educational system today is how to advance students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds and from a cultural background which is different from that of the privileged sectors of the population.

In the early years of the establishment of the State, there was only a minimal awareness of the existence of this problem. Today, however, in the thirty-first year of the existence of the State, the entire educational system is geared to deal with this problem in a comprehensive manner.

The Target Population

In general, the problem of educationally disadvantaged students is related to the problem of social gaps. These gaps are of a political, economic and educational nature, and are found primarily between the sectors of the population coming from the Afro-Asian countries and those whose origin is in the western countries of Europe and the Americas.

According to the last population census which took place in 1972, 47.4% of the Jewish population are of Afro-Asian origin, 44.2% come from European-American origin, and 8.4% are second generation Israelis -- children of fathers born in Israel. The rates, however vary according to the different age-groups.

A disadvantaged student is one who has grown-up in an environment which impedes his personal development, a situation which usually results in poor academic achievements.

The Israeli term for disadvantaged is "Teunei - Tipuach", which means, "those who are in need of fostering." The Hebrew term is optimistic in that it implies that the child will necessarily benefit from educational intervention

In 1974, the Index of Need for Advancement (INA) was devised by the Planning Division of the Ministry of Education. The definition referred to pupil groups and was based on the results of final exams in the eighth grade of elementary school in 1972. The pupil population of that year was divided into four categories according to father's country of origin[1], five categories according to the father's education level, and seven family-size categories. Pupil groups were defined by the combinations of these three characteristics. Those of which 40% or fewer attained a score of 70 (the median in this test), were defined as having poor chance for learning success and thus, disadvantaged. Forty-two percent of the pupils in elementary schools were defined as potentially disadvantaged and 95% of the latter, were children of Asian-African origin[2]

The Development of the Educational Treatment

A review of the development of treating the problem of the disadvantaged reveals four distinct stages:

--A characteristic of the first stage was a lack of a differential approach to the problem. Education was equal for all.

--At the second stage a condition of severe educational lag between large sectors of the student population began to show, and special assistance programs were introduced. These programs were intended to treat students in those stages of learning where there were manifest symptoms of backwardness. For example, new methods of teaching reading in the first grade were developed and special courses of study were introduced in the graduating classes of the elementary

1. Israel, Europe - America, Asia, Africa.
2. For further details, see Mosheh Egozi's paper.

school in order to prepare the students for admission into the secondary schools.

--At the third stage the treatment of the problem was continued in an intensified manner, by introducing a number of new compensatory programs, yet, without changing the overall framework. Among these programs in the elementary schools were: remedial teaching, guidance for teachers, lengthening of the school-day, grouping students into ability groups, enrichment programs.

The framework of the secondary education was expanded, especially by the broadening of the vocational schools system. These schools are the dominant framework for the disadvantaged.[3]

--In the last stage radical changes take place within the educational framework itself. The objective of the educational policy-planners is twofold: To bring about over-all changes in both the administrative and curricular-pedagogical domains of the system, and to treat the problem of the disadvantaged within a broader scope and by a multi-dimensional approach.

The purpose of the overall changes is to attack the problem of the disadvantaged students in an heterogeneous and diversified system of education which is fully adapted to the needs of all group-students. In addition to that educational interventions take place in the family, in the peer-group, at school and in other educational institutions.

Two main programs represent this approach: Reform of Secondary Education accompanied by Integration, and a comprehensive program for the disadvantaged called "The Educational Welfare Program."

Before outlining these programs, it would be worthwile to discuss problems of cultural pluralism and its effect upon schooling and integration policy-making.

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3. For further details see the paper which was presented by the Department of Vocational Education

Cultural Pluralism and Integration Policy

Basically, a common cultural background is shared by all Jewish groups in Israel. Religious and national traditions which stem from the distant past bind the Jews together. Biblical Hebrew, a language which was dead for about 2,000 years, has been revived since the beginning of the 20th century and has become a spoken language of all Jews in Israel. Differences that exist between groups from different countries stem from the various cultural differences which exist between the countries in which Jewish communities had lived. Influences of the alien societies affected their way of thinking and their patterns of life. Nevertheless, it can be said that generally common values predominate over different approaches and attitudes towards existential problems.

In regard to the cultural values as opposed to the intellectual and academic values, the problem may be referred to as difference rather than a gap. The difficulty is that it is not clear whether cultural differences are one of the causes of the educational gap and if so, to what extent.

Consideration of cultural characteristics can be valuable in determining educational policy. An example can be given to illustrate this point: The Hebrew language is a Semitic language which has close affinity to other Oriental and Middle-Eastern languages. Jews who come from Middle-Eastern countries are likely to posess pure Hebrew pronunciation. Conversely, the spoken Hebrew of European Jews is generally distorted because of the influence of the European languages. Linguists use the speech of elderly Jews who come from Yemen, Iraq and other Oriental countries as a standard of correct Hebrew pronunciation. The situation in the schools is different. Children of the Eastern-born families while attending schools hear privileged children, who generally belong to European families, pronouncing Hebrew consonants in a European style. The Oriental children try to imitate the European ones, because of their generally recognized academic superiority, and because they represent the dominant group.

A more desireable situation is one in which the superiority of the Oriental children in this area is recognized and even reinforced.

Two years ago, the "Center for the Integration of Traditions" was established within the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Center is active in a few areas: developing curricula which relate to the history, literature and traditions of the Oriental communities, encouraging relevant research in the universities and folklore activity of various organizations.

In the academic field, things have to be reconsidered, as well. Recent evidence in foreign language education shows that the notion of a general educational lag which has been so widely accepted is not clear cut. English is taught in all schools from grade five to grade twelve.

The failure rate in final exams in high school is very high and in particular Oriental students perform much more poorly than Western students.[4] Recently, teaching Arabic has been accelerated. In elementary schools where colloquial Arabic is taught, Pasternak has analyzed test results after one year and after two years of instruction. He found that Oriental students whose parents come from Arab speaking countries and other Oriental countries did better than Western students.[5]

It is assumed that integration between different groups can succeed when positive perceptions are created between the groups which are integrated.[6] The situation may be so when each of the groups can contribute both its cultural and academic strengths. Therefore, it is clear that factors such as those discussed here should be carefully considered and exploited in the implementation of

4. Lewy, A., et.a. - Educational Achievement in the Israeli School System (IEA); Israel, 1978, pp 93-106 (Hebrew).
5. Pasternak, Sh. - Achievements of the Teaching of Spoken Arabic as a Foreign Language; Hachinuch, Nov., 1978, pp 87-91 (Hebrew).
6. Amir, Y. - Ethnic Interactions and Intergroup Attitudes and Relations, Megamot, Vol. 23, Dec, 1977 pp vi-vii.

educational integration.

The Reform of Secondary Education and School-Integration

Since 1967 a reform in the structure of the educational system has been in the process of implementation. Eight years of elementary schooling and four years of high school have been changed to six years elementary and six years of secondary education, composed of three years of junior high school and three years of senior high school.

The two aims of forming the new junior high school system are: to raise educational achievements and to integrate students from different elementary schools districts, which are attended by different sectors of the population.

So far, more than half of the students in the 7th and 8th grades attend school at the new junior high schools. Parents generally tended to accept the changes, However, there were places in which there was strong objection to the Reform and to integration. An appeal to the High Court of Justice was made by a group of parents. The Court, however, ordered the parents to act in accordance with the policy of the Ministry of Education.

Experiments are being made in order to improve the process of integration and to develop teaching methods for the heterogeneous classes. Integration policy is being implemented in the elementary school level too, but only in an experimental and local way.

Two main constraints interrupt proper development of the Reform and integration process. One constraint is related to the fact that the school system in Israel is divided into sub-systems: state school system and state-religious school system.[7] Integration between the two is impossible. Within the state-religious schools system about 75% of all the students fall into the category of those who are potentially disadvantaged according to the IMA. Thus, integration

7. About 21% of Elementary-schools population.

with proper proportions between privileged and disadvantaged students is impossible in many places, in the state-religious schools system. Another constraint is connected with the fact that many communities have a homogeneous population which makes it impossible to integrate.

The Educational Welfare Program

As a result of social tensions in our society, which took place in 1971, the government appointed a public committee whose task was to study the situation of children and youth in distress. The committee which was called "The Prime Minister's Committee for Disadvantaged Children and Youth" completed its work in June, 1973. The committee analyzed the situation of the disadvantaged youth and pointed out that despite all which had been done, there was still much to be done. The Ministry of Education referred to these conclusions in order to implement new educational interventions and expand some of the already existing ones. A program which had been prepared was brought before the government and was confirmed. A large budget was allocated for the implementation of the program, which is called: "The Educational Welfare Program."

The program consists of two sub-programs: The Three Critical Age Groups Program and the Comprehensive Local-Communities' Program.

1) The Three Critical Age Groups Program: The three age-groups which are treated are as follows: Pre-school children, adolescents who are alienated from the school framework and young adults who are potential candidates for post-secondary educational institutions. These age-groups were selected for treatment on the recommendation of "The Prime Minister's Committee." It has been pointed out that at pre-school level, including infants, there were thousands brought up under deprived conditions and without getting sufficient intellectual stimulation. It was assumed that educational involvement in this level could support proper personal development. As to young

adolescents, the Committee pointed out that about 20000 youngsters were neither attending school nor working, their rehabilitation was urgent. Treatment of young adults was aimed at building-up the future political and intellectual leadership of the disadvantaged population.

Yet, it should be emphasized that programs had already been operating before the initiation of "The Three-Critical Age Groups Program." These previous programs were intended for all age levels. The Educational Welfare Program focused on expanding and adding programs at the three critical age groups.

Programs for pre-school children include: Parents' guidance for developing cognitive proficiencies of their children, guidance for kindergarten teachers, assistant teachers in kindergartens, educational and enrichment activities for mothers and children.

Programs for 12-17 year olds include: Developing special teaching methods intended to improve reasoning and thinking functions, inaugurating special institutions called "Educational Centers" in which all learning, vocational and social activities are fully geared to the needs of alienated youth.

Programs for the young adults include: Special intensive courses ("Second Chance") for preparing them for the matriculation examinations ("Bagrut"), preparatory courses attached to all the universities for students who previously were not eligible for higher education. About 2,500 young adults participate in these programs this year.

2) <u>The Comprehensive Local Communities' Program</u>: According to this program communities defined as distressed areas are being intensively and comprehensively treated. Intervention should be intensive and comprehensive because the belief is that the failure of many educational interventions was due to the fact that they dealt only with surface phenomena and neglected the multi-dimensional nature of disadvantage.

Programs are designed and operated with maximal participation of local citizens. It is felt that doing this maximizes the accountability of particular communities and meets the desires of the community members to control their own educational system.

Four general goals were set for this program:

--To improve academic achievements.

--To eliminate school dropouts.

--To increase the number of candidates for higher education.

--To strengthen community spirit.

The program was intitiated in 1975 in 28 communities and neighborhoods and has presently expanded to 77.

Practically, the program is implemented by steering committees appointed in each locality. Members of the steering committee are local representatives and supervisors from the Ministry of Education. It is up to this committee to study specific needs, to set goals, to plan educational activities and to coordinate different organizations which operate within the community's educational framework. Last, but not least, is the task of maintaing follow-up and assessment of procedures.

The steering committee gets a yearly allocation with which it functions. Programs which are selected can be structured ones which are offered by certain departments of the Ministry and others are fully local. Some of the programs are offered by the Schools of Education of the universities and by research institutions.

Other Programs

A few other programs are worthwhile mentioning.

1) Boarding schools: Students with good learning ability, who come from poor families are admitted to boarding schools after graduating from elementary school. There are presently about 3,000 students in this program.

Boarding schools are also available for children, five to eleven years old who come from deprived families. There are presently about 1,000 children in this program.

2) Tutoring Program: A comprehensive and structured system of tutoring has been developed during the last few years:

--Tutoring for pre-school children conducted by adults.

--"Student to Student Tutorship" -- students from secondary schools receivespecial training and guidance in order to instruct students from lower grades.

--Students from universities throughout the country participate in a program of helping children in elementary schools. A university student who participates in this program receives a stipend of up to 50% of his tuition at the university. There are, in this academic year, about 4,000 students, 8% of the university population,who take part in this program.

3) Programs for dropouts: These programs include: Special individual care by accompanying children to and from school, day-clubs, which are the children's homes where they stay all during the afternoons and are taken care of.

Achievements and Problems

At this stage our greatest achievement lies in the fact that the educational system reacnes most children of school age and is capable of responding to the variety of needs of children who differ greatly in their abilities and inclinations.

The question of scholastic achievements and the problem of narrowing the cultural gap between different cultural groups is a very difficult and complicated one. It requires a systematic and continuous approach of study and research.

A comparative study was conducted in a number of countries, including Israel, by the Association of Educational Achievements (IEA) and was published in Israel last year.[8] The findings of shis study indicate that on the basis of their ahievements the Israeli students may be included among the developed countries and not among the underdeveloped ones. The same is true with regard to the students of Afro-Asian origin. According to the opinion of the researchers these findings verify the achievement of the disadvantaged students.[9]

Be this as it may, there remains much to be done, as is shown by the numerous studies which point to the unsatisfactory achievements and to the continuing of an educational gap.[10]

8. Lewy A., C. Rapaport , M. Rimor - Educational Achievements in the Israeli School System; (IEA), A Cross National Comparative Study, Israel, 1978 (Hebrew).
9. Ibid., pp 185-198.
10. See, for instance:A. Minkovitch, D. Davis, J. Bashi- Evaluation of Educational Achievements in the Elementary School in Israel; Israel, June, 1977.

Some questions may be raised:

-- Should the program of Integration be fully extended to kindergartens and elementary schools?

-- How can we go on with the policy of Integration assuring the full educational progress of each individual?

-- Should autonomy, which is presently given to local communities (steering committees), be extended?

-- How and by what criteria should the programs included in the Educational Welfare Program be assessed?